Dawah:
The Mission of Muslim Ummah

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Shahadah or 'witnessing' is a very exalted task. God will bless those who engage in it with a lofty position in Paradise.

Shahadah is precisely what is also called *dawah*, or calling people towards God. It is to convey, in a peaceful manner, God's message to humankind. It is to explain the reality of life to people in a manner that is intelligible to them. It aims to enable seekers of Truth to learn about God's Creation Plan. And as for those who do not have any desire to search for Truth, *shahadah* is to engage in providing them the necessary evidence for Truth so that in the Hereafter they will not be able to claim that they had no idea what God had wanted of them.

Different words are used in the Quran to refer to *shahadah* or the *dawah* mission, such as *tabligh* (5:67), which means to preach, and 'bearing good news and giving warning' (4:165). The literal meaning of *shahadah* is 'to witness'. *Shahadah* and *dawah* both mean the same thing, but the former contains an element of particular emphasis,

indicating that it entails engaging in the work of *dawah* in such a complete way that the very being of the one who does this becomes a total embodiment of *dawah*.

This is what *shahadah* or witnessing is. The belief, held by some people, that *shahadah* has two levels—verbal *shahadah*, and practical *shahadah*—is alien to the Quran. According to advocates of this notion, it is not enough to engage in *shahadah* through words, whether written or spoken. Instead, they claim, it is also imperative to establish a 'total system', in this way giving practical expression to, or demonstration of, *shahadah*. This notion of *shahadah* as a 'system' is, however, not present in the Quran. Neither did any of the prophets implement this notion, not even the last prophet, the Prophet Muhammad.

According to the Quran (33:45), the Prophet of Islam was a witness. Undoubtedly, he engaged in the task of witnessing to Truth in a perfect manner. But he did not express this in the form of establishing of a total system—neither in

the Makkan phase of his life as a prophet, nor in the Madinan phase. The fact of the matter is that *shahadah* or witnessing is a task that is accomplished through words. Along with this, the *dai*, or one who is engaged in *dawah* or *shahadah*, must be a well-wisher and an honest person. That is to say, with regard to the *madu*, or the person whom he calls towards God, he must be a well-wisher, in the complete sense of the term, and with regard to God, he must be completely honest.

In the Quran, the word *shahadah* appears, in different forms, 160 times. In every place, it appears in the sense of witness. The word is used in the Quran in different contexts, but everywhere it is in this sense of witness, and not in any other sense.

According to the Quran, the role of a prophet is to be God's witness over people. Through peaceful ideological efforts, he informs them as to why God has created them and tells them about the Hereafter and what will happen then.

This was the common purpose of all the prophets, and every prophet fully performed this task of *shahadah* or witnessing to the Truth, and in a non-political manner.

The chain of prophethood came to an end with the last prophet, the Prophet Muhammad, but the prophetic mission continues as before. After the last prophet, God's message must continue to be conveyed to humanity in every age and generation, and this must carry on till the Day of Judgment. This task is for the *ummat-e muhammadi*, the followers of the Prophet Muhammad, to undertake. This witnessing is a continuation of the Prophet's mission after his leaving this world. This task can be carried out properly only if it is done in a spirit of honesty and well-wishing. Honesty here means that nothing should be added to, or mixed with, the actual divine message. Well-wishing here means that those who engage in witnessing to Truth must be impelled, even on a purely unilateral basis, by a concern for the genuine well-being of the *madu*s,

those whom they call towards God, so that the latter can have no reasonable ground to deny this call.

This responsibility of the *ummah* of the Prophet Muhammad is explained in the Quran (2:143) as follows:

> *Thus We have made you a middle nation, so that you may act as witnesses for mankind, and the Messenger may be a witness for you.*

From this we learn that as a 'middle nation' the *ummah* of the Prophet Muhammad is an intermediary between the last prophet and later generations of people. It takes God's religion from the last of the prophets and conveys it to later generations of people, without expecting any recompense for this and engaging in this task till the Day of Judgment. This conveying of God's religion is not simple announcement. Rather, it is necessary that the religion be conveyed, as the Quran (4:63) says, in such terms as will address people's minds.

In line with this Quranic teaching, the world is,

for all times to come, *Dar ud-Dawah*, an abode or domain of *dawah*, and nothing else. Accordingly, the relationship between the *ummah* of the Prophet Muhammad and other people is just one—and that is, that the former are *shahid*, or those who bear witness to Truth, while the latter are *mashhud*, or those who are witnessed to (85:3). This can also be expressed as the relationship between *dai* and *madu*.

This *dawah* responsibility of the *ummah* of the Prophet Muhammad is expressed in a *hadith* as follows:

> *Muslims are the witnesses of God on earth.* (*Sahih al-Bukhari,* 2642)

The *ummah* of the Prophet Muhammad must engage in this task of bearing witness using only those methods that the Prophet employed for this purpose. This is a divine task, in which it is not at all permissible to include any political, communal or materialistic aims and objectives. If any other purposes are included in this mission, it would, in the words of the Quran, be an instance of *rukun*

or 'tilt', which is something that will make one deserving of severe punishment in God's eyes. As the Quran (11:113) says:

> *Do not incline toward those who do wrong, lest the Fire touch you. For [then] you would have none to protect you from God, and you will not be helped.*

Dawah in Terms that Addresses People's Minds

The task of witnessing or *dawah* is a prophetic mission for all times. It has to be engaged in continuously and in every age and generation. The essential message of this mission will always remain the same, but in line with changes in the times there could be changes in the manner in which it is carried out. To make this task of witnessing or *dawah* effective, it must be done in a manner that successfully addresses the minds of people in every age. Without taking into account this factor of temporal change it will not be possible to fulfil the conditions required for offering people adequate arguments about

God and the divine religion, which is a necessary condition for the proper performance of the task of *shahadah* or *dawah*.

Dawah in the Age of Reason

Passing through several centuries, the prophetic mission of *dawah* or *shahadah* has arrived in the 21st century, which is considered to be the Age of Reason. It is now essential to present the message of God with adequate rational proofs and logic in order to address the modern mind. Without this, the task of *dawah* cannot be properly performed.

The Greatest Witness

In later times, this *dawah* mission was to spread all across the world. This development is referred to in the Hadith as *shahadat-e-aʿzam*, that is, 'the greatest witness'. The Prophet of Islam had said that a time would come when it would become necessary to perform the work of *dawah* with rational arguments (*hujjat*). Those who present

the message of God by employing arguments that are in accordance with the rational standards of their time will be held deserving of great reward by God. The *dawah* of such people is referred to in a *hadith* in these words: "This is the greatest witness in the eyes of the Lord of the Worlds." (*Sahih Muslim*, 2938)

Distortions in the Understanding of the Concept of *Shahadah*

In the early period of Islam, the concept of *shahadah* was precisely that which has been outlined above. In this period, the word *shahadah* was used in the sense of witnessing to Truth. As far as giving up one's life in God's path is concerned, the term that was used was *qital*. For example, the Quran says (2:154):

> *Do not say that those who are killed in God's cause* (yuqtalu fi sabilillah) *are dead; they are alive, but you are not aware of it.*

In line with this Quranic verse, those who are killed in God's cause will be called *maqtul fi*

sabilillah (one who is killed in the cause of God). Undoubtedly, such a person will receive a great reward from God, but if he is remembered in human language, he will be called *maqtul fi sabilillah*, one who is killed in the cause of God. During the Battle of Uhud, in the year 625 C.E., 70 companions of the Prophet were killed. This is recounted in a tradition in these words: "On the day of Uhud, seventy among the Companions of the Prophet were killed." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, 4078). This example shows that during the prophetic period, one who was killed in God's cause was referred to as *maqtul*, and not as *shahid*, or martyr.

After the age of the Prophet, the age of his Companions and the generation after them are regarded as authentic periods of Islamic history. The very same manner of referring to people who had been slain in the path of God as *maqtul fi sabilillah* continued to be followed in this period. But after this time, a change gradually emerged in the use of the term *shahadah*, in the same way as changes began being made in the understanding

of several other Islamic teachings, so much so that Muslims almost forgot that the term *shahadah* meant *dawah* and instead began to use the word as synonymous with martyrdom.

In later times, a new practice developed of referring to a person who had died in battle as *shahid* in the sense of martyr. The word *shahid* began being added to their names. So, for instance, Hasan al-Banna (founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, who was assassinated in 1949) began being called as 'Hasan al-Banna Shahid', Sayyid Qutb (key ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood, who was hanged in 1966) as 'Sayyid Qutb Shahid', Sayyid Ahmad (killed in 1831 in a war he declared against the Sikhs) as 'Sayyid Ahmad Shahid', Shah Ismail (follower of Sayyid Ahmad, who was killed along with him) as 'Shah Ismail Shahid', and so on. Now, there were several Companions of the Prophet whose lives were also sacrificed, but in none of their cases was the word *shahid* appended to their names. So, although their lives were sacrificed, the Caliphs

Umar ibn al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan and Ali ibn Abi Talib are not called 'Umar ibn al-Khattab Shahid', 'Uthman ibn Affan Shahid' and 'Ali ibn Abi Talib Shahid' respectively. The names of the Prophet's Companions were always written and mentioned along with that of their fathers (for example, Ali *ibn* [son of] Abi Talib), and not with the suffix *shahid*, in contrast to the practice that developed later. Accordingly, Imam Bukhari, in his collection of *hadith*, has a chapter containing reports of this sort, titled *Bab la yaqulu fulan shahid*, meaning 'The Chapter on Not Calling So and So a Martyr'.

This is no minor matter. Rather, it is based on an important principle of Islam—and that is, that people should be called by their father's names. "Call them after their own fathers; that is closer to justice in the sight of God", the Quran (33:5) says. To add the suffix *shahid* or any other such word to someone's name is to create an unreal picture of a person. This is not in accordance with Islamic etiquette.

This un-Islamic practice with regard to *shahadah* and *shahid* has today reached its ultimate limit. This is the actual reason for the violence that has spread among Muslims today. Those Muslims who are killed in this violence are given the title of *shahid* and hailed as martyrs and it is claimed that they will enter Paradise as soon as they die.

This phenomenon as such emerged in the age of European colonialism. In this period, various Western powers established their dominance in lands inhabited by Muslims. Because of the wrong guidance of their intellectuals and leaders, Muslims were fired with a burning desire for revenge. This thirst first took the form of extreme hate, and then escalated into deadly violence.

In order to project this violence as 'holy', it began being claimed that those who died spearheading this violence were 'martyrs' or *shahid*s and would enter Paradise immediately, without being at all questioned by God. This, without any doubt, was a self-invented claim,

one that has nothing whatsoever to do with the Quran and Hadith.

The ultimate destructive form of this extreme negative reaction to other communities is the phenomenon that has taken root among Muslims that is known as suicide-bombing. In order to sanction it and bless it as supposedly holy or sacred, some *ulema* or Muslim scholars have wrongly given it the name of *istishhad* or seeking martyrdom. And so, today, large numbers of Muslims are giving up their lives in the name of *shahadah*, but no one—neither the Muslim *ulema*, nor the Muslim public—seems at all interested in engaging in the actual work of *shahadah*, which is calling people towards God. The people of other communities who are being attacked and killed by those who champion this self-invented understanding of *shahadah* are actually *madu*s of the Muslim *ummah*, people to whom Muslims should communicate the message of God—and to kill *madu*s is not at all permissible in Islam.

Imitating the Practice of Ancient Jews

A *hadith* tells us that in later times, the *ummah* of the Prophet Muhammad will definitely imitate the Jews. The Prophet said: "You [Muslims] shall definitely follow the ways of those before you, span by span, cubit by cubit; so much so that if they entered inside a lizard's hole, so would you." The Companions asked: "O Messenger of God, is it the Jews and the Christians?" The Prophet replied: "Who else!" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, 7320)

This, actually, has to do with a law of nature, which is expressed in the Quran (57:16) as the hardening of hearts with the passage of time:

> *"[...] whose hearts with the passage of time became hardened [...]".*

That is to say, degeneration sets in among later generations of a community as a result of the passage of a long period of time, resulting in various forms of ills. The most deadly form of this phenomenon of degeneration among present-day Muslims is their imitating of the practice

of the Jews of ancient times with regard to the responsibility of witnessing to the Truth. God had appointed the Jews as the witnesses of His religion. This is mentioned in the Bible (Isaiah 43:10) as follows:

> *"You are My witnesses," declares the Lord, "and My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. Before Me no god was formed, nor will there be one after Me."*

When, in later times, degeneration set in among the Jews, they abandoned this task of calling people to God's religion. This was because their degenerated psyche had engendered in them a narrow communal mentality. This is the phenomenon that is known in history as 'Jewish supremacism'. Because of this, their concern was now limited to their community alone. They no longer remained well-wishers of others. In fact, they viewed others as the enemies of their nation because others did not accept their self-styled claim of superiority. And so, the Jews abandoned

the task of being witnesses to God's religion, being concerned now only with themselves and their own communal affairs. But along with this, in their extreme self-righteousness, they kept up with the claim that they continued to follow the religion that was taught by their prophet, the Prophet Moses.

This fact about the Jews is mentioned in the Quran (3:187-88) as follows:

> *God made a covenant with those who were given the Book to make it known to people and not conceal it. But they cast it behind their backs and bartered it for a paltry price: what an evil bargain they made! Those who exult in their misdeeds and love to be praised for what they have not done should not suppose that they are secure from punishment; they shall suffer a grievous punishment.*

A study of present-day Muslims reveals that they have become complete followers of the ancient Jews in this regard. They have abandoned the task of *dawah*, of calling people towards God. Instead of this, they are engaged in affairs that

concern their own community alone, which they wrongly consider to be *dawah*. They have changed the concept of *shahadah* or witnessing, taking it instead to mean 'martyrdom'. They are engaged in communal politics, and when in pursuing this self-styled politics of theirs, some of their people are killed, they bestow on them the title of *shahid* and go about claiming that they are engaging in the task of *dawah* and *shahadah* in the manner that God wants them to.

People's actions reflect the underlying psychological impulses or factors that lead them to act in a particular manner. To engage in the task of *dawah*, you need to have the spirit of well-wishing for others. But in their age of degeneration, an extreme form of communal supremacism took root among Muslims, because of which they began viewing other communities as inferior to them and as their enemies. A result of this mentality was that no longer did they have any well-wishing for others. Present-day Muslims

are, generally speaking, victims of this Muslim communal psyche.

This is the major factor that has robbed present-day Muslims of the enthusiasm for engaging in *dawah*. They claim that their activities are geared to promoting the *Nizam-e Mustafa* ('The System of the Prophet'), but whatever they are engaged in has no relationship with the *Nizam-e Mustafa* at all.

The present-day Muslims' predicament is exactly the same as that which the Quran (3:188) describes with regard to the Jews who had fallen prey to degeneration:

> *Those who exult in their misdeeds and love to be praised for what they have not done should not suppose that they are secure from punishment; they shall suffer a grievous punishment.*

These words of the Quran apply fully to present-day Muslims. These Muslims want the title *dawah* and *shahadah* for their communal activities, but, in line with the law of God, this will never happen. This sort of attitude is, without any

doubt, punishable by God, and is definitely not something that merits any reward whatsoever.

Suicide-Bombing

Today, in line with their degenerate communal mindset, a phenomenon has emerged among Muslims which is an extreme form of *tahleel-e-haram*, or wrongly seeking to make the unlawful lawful. And that is suicide-bombing—or, in other words, strapping bombs onto oneself and blowing oneself up in order to kill a supposed enemy.

This action is, without any doubt at all, forbidden or *haraam* according to the sources of the Islamic Shariah. Some Muslim scholars have, on their own, sought to claim that suicide-bombing is legitimate by terming it as *istishhad* or seeking martyrdom. But this sort of reasoning is baseless. No self-styled *fatwa* of this sort can make a clearly and unambiguously forbidden act like suicide-bombing legitimate.

A *hadith* provides clear guidance in this matter. This report is found in various books of Hadith—

for instance, in *Sahih al-Bukhari* (*hadith* no. 3062), *Sahih Muslim* (*hadith* no. 112), *Musnad Imam Ahmad* (*hadith* no. 8090), etc. The narrative in these different texts is worded roughly identically. According to this narrative, a Companion of the Prophet relates:

> *We were accompanying the Prophet in a war* (ghazwa). *Along with us was a person named Quzman who had already embraced the faith. During the war he suffered a serious injury. People began to praise him before the Prophet for the bravery he had exhibited in the war. But the Prophet said:* Innahu min ahl in-nar. *That is, "He is surely one of the people of Hell." The Companions were taken aback by the Prophet's words, so he asked them to go and investigate the matter. It was then that they learnt that Quzman had been severely injured during the war and when he could not bear the pain any more, he killed himself with his own weapon. When the Prophet was told about this, he uttered these words: "God is great, and I bear witness that I am His messenger."*

It is a fact that in Islam, suicide is something that is completely *haraam* or forbidden—so much so that even if a person who appears to be a Companion of the Prophet and exhibits great bravery while fighting on the battlefield but, finally, kills himself with his own weapon, his death will be an unlawful death on account of his suicide. Under no pretext or excuse can it be made legitimate.

Suppose some Muslims are attacked and they fight in defence, and, in doing so, they die. In this case, their death is legitimate or *jaiz*. But if they knowingly and deliberately strap bombs around their bodies and then go amidst their supposed enemies and explode these bombs and thereby kill others and themselves, it is, very clearly, a form of suicide, and so it is definitely illegitimate in Islam.

It is legitimate for believers to take to self-defence when attacked. If they are not in a position to do so, the way for them is to exercise patience, not to resort to suicide-bombing. But

the obsession with suicide-bombing has become so acute among certain Muslims today that they are not even willing to seriously reflect on the fact that it is clearly forbidden in Islam.

Useless War

According to a *hadith*, the Prophet of Islam said: "By Him in whose hands is my soul, the world will not end until a time comes when the killer will not know why he killed and the slain will not know why he was killed." Someone asked the Prophet why this would happen. He answered: "This will happen in the age of *harj* [the age of fighting and bloodshed]. Both the killer and the slain will go to Hell." (*Sahih Muslim*, 2908)

Hadith commentators generally translate the word *harj* as excessive fighting and bloodshed. This sort of senseless, frenzied slaughter happens among a people when, driven by communal supremacism, they areit is fired by blind enmity for others. This is the condition of present-day Muslims. This mindset has become so

widespread and deeply-rooted among them that in their narrow communalism they think of other communities as their foes. They have begun to imagine that others are engaged in conspiracies against them. On the basis of this self-created idea of theirs, their hearts are now filled with feelings of hate for others. The extremist violence among Muslims today is a result of this. They are now drowned in hate, not only for other communities but also for those co-religionists of theirs whom they regard as supporters of their enemies.

Today, scores of Muslim terrorist groups are engaged in horrific violence in different parts of the world—not sparing even little children in schools, worshippers in mosques and people grieving for the dead in graveyards. This completely unjustified slaughter has now assumed such horrific proportions that the terrorists have come to think of slaughter as a desirable end in itself, even though they have no justified reason for it at all.

Solving the Problem

There is only solution to this very disturbing situation of the Muslim *ummah* today—and that is, that the *ummah* should be given the right ideology. Muslims who have taken to violence are victims of a wrong understanding of Islam. The only way to change this is to enable them to learn about the true ideology of Islam that is based on the Quran and Hadith. Nothing less than this will suffice to change the state of affairs that prevails today.

Muslims should, for instance, be made aware of a fundamental reality that the Quran (41:34-36) expresses in the following words:

> *Good and evil deeds are not equal. Repel evil with what is better; then you will see that one who was once your enemy has become your dearest friend, but no one will be granted such goodness except those who exercise patience and self-restraint – no one is granted it save those who are truly fortunate. If a prompting from Satan should stir you, seek refuge*

with God: He is the All Hearing and the All Knowing.

According to this passage from the Quran, the distinction that exists among people is not that between friends and enemies, but, rather, between actual friends and potential friends. This is a law of nature. In accordance with this, Muslims must not regard anybody as their enemies. Instead, without discriminating against anyone, they should try to make everyone their friend. It is this that is the *dawah* spirit, and it is this that is called *dawah*, or calling people towards God.

Similarly, Muslims must be reminded of the Quranic verse (5:32) that refers to the heinous crime of the slaughter of innocent people:

That was why We laid it down for the Children of Israel that whoever killed a human being, except as a punishment for murder or for spreading corruption in the land, shall be regarded as having killed all mankind, and that whoever saved a

human life shall be regarded as having saved all mankind.

Likewise, Muslims need to be reminded that for a Muslimto kill a fellow Muslim is an act that would lead him to Hell. As the Quran (4:93) says:

If anyone kills a believer deliberately, his reward shall be eternal Hell. God will condemn him and reject him, and prepare for him a terrible punishment.

The Prophet's Last Will

Today, there is an urgent need to remind all Muslims throughout the world of a warning by the Prophet that he issued on the occasion of the *Hajjatul Wida* ('The Farewell Pilgrimage'). In the words of a narrative recorded in the *Sahih al-Bukhari*:

Abdullah ibn Abbas narrated that the Prophet delivered a sermon before people on the Day of Sacrifice. The Prophet asked, "O people, what day is this?" They replied, "A sacred day." Then he said, "What city is this?" They replied, "A sacred city."

Then he said, "What month is this?" They replied, "A sacred month." The Prophet said: "Verily your blood, your property, and your honour are as sacred and inviolable as the sacredness of this day of yours, in this month of yours, in this town of yours." The Prophet repeated these words several times. Then he raised his head towards the sky and said: "O God, have I conveyed the message? O God, have I conveyed the message?" Abdullah ibn Abbas said: "By Him in whose hands is my soul, this is Prophet's bequest to his followers. So, he who is present should convey it to him who is not." Then Abdullah ibn Abbas repeated these words of the Prophet: "Do not turn disbelievers after me, striking off each other's necks." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, 1739)

The Task Before Muslims

Today, the Muslim *ummah*, by and large, is sunk deep in negative thinking. This is only because of its degenerated mindset. In line with its negative thinking, it has wrongly come to think of other

communities as enemies. For some Muslims, this view is held at the level of thought, while others, driven by this mindset, are engaged in violence. This is certainly a very dangerous signal, which had been predicted centuries ago by the Prophet.

Today, it has become a duty binding on Muslims to develop positive thinking. They must completely stop thinking of other communities as their enemies. They must be reminded of the fact that their status is not that of a community, but, rather, that of an ideological group, one that has just one mission—and that is, peaceful *dawah*, or calling people towards God. This task they must engage in with unilateral well-wishing for others. Even if, according to their thinking, others are oppressing or mistreating them, they must ignore it and remain their well-wishers and convey to them God's message, which is preserved in the form of the Quran and the Sunnah or the practice of the Prophet. Other than this, no action is going to save them from punishment in the Hereafter.

For over a century now, violence in the name

of Islam has been continuing unabated, yet it has completely failed to produce any positive results. It has been a total failure. The violent activities engaged in by Muslims have proven to be totally counter-productive as far as Muslims themselves are concerned. The extremely negative results of this violence clearly show that Muslims do not enjoy God's help in this regard. Had they received God's help in this matter, they would definitely have been successful. This situation, therefore, demands that Muslims re-look at what they have been doing. They must completely renounce violence, and, instead, get engaged in peaceful *dawah* work. This is the only way that can make them deserving of God's blessings.